

What is claimed is:

1. A method for delivery of programming content over a communications network, comprising:
 - detecting an indicator indicative of an event in the delivery of the programming content;
 - in response to a detection of the indicator, determining an audience currently receiving the programming content;
 - obtaining data descriptive of at least one group of members of the audience;
 - generating at least one programming segment based at least on the data; and
 - providing, to the at least one group, the at least one programming segment in lieu of the programming content during the event.
2. The method of claim 1, wherein the indicator contains a message which includes a start time of the event.
3. The method of claim 1, further comprising:
 - identifying available transmission channels in the network; and
 - transmitting the at least one programming segment over at least one of the available transmission channels.
4. The method of claim 1, wherein the event includes an advertisement break.
5. The method of claim 1, wherein the indicator includes a digital program insertion (DPI) cue.
6. The method of claim 1, wherein the at least one programming segment comprises one or more advertisements.
7. The method of claim 1, wherein the network includes a two-way multi-channel delivery network.
8. The method of claim 1, wherein the network includes a cable TV network.

9. A method for delivering a program stream containing programming material over a communications network to a plurality of user terminals, comprising:

detecting, in the program stream, a message indicating a scheduled programming segment;

in response to a detection of the message, identifying a set of one or more user terminals which is currently receiving the program stream;

identifying one or more groups of user terminals within the set;

generating one or more data streams containing one or more alternate programming segments for substituting the scheduled programming segment; and

providing at least one of the data streams to a selected one of the identified groups over the communications network.

10. The method of claim 9, wherein the scheduled programming segment comprises one or more advertisements.

11. The method of claim 9, wherein the message includes a start time of the scheduled programming segment.

12. The method of claim 9, wherein the message includes a DPI cue.

13. The method of claim 9, wherein at least one of the alternate programming segments comprises advertisements.

14. The method of claim 9, further comprising:

directing at least one user terminal in the selected group to tune from a first transmission channel to a second transmission channel at the start of the scheduled programming segment;

transmitting the at least one data stream over the second transmission channel; and

directing the at least one user terminal in the selected group to re-tune to the first transmission channel at the end of the scheduled programming segment.

15. The method of claim 9, wherein the one or more groups are identified by analyzing demographic data associated with the user terminals in the set.
16. The method of claim 9, wherein the one or more groups are identified as a function of at least the number of available transmission channels in the network.
17. The method of claim 16, wherein the one or more groups are identified also as a function of the number of additional scheduled programming segments expected to occur concurrently with the scheduled programming segment.
18. The method of claim 16, wherein the one or more groups are identified also as a function of the number of additional program streams expected to be delivered concurrently with the program stream during the scheduled programming segment.
19. The method of claim 18, wherein the additional program streams utilize a subset of the available transmission channels.
20. The method of claim 16, further comprising determining a subset of the available transmission channels for carrying the one or more data streams.
21. The method of claim 9, wherein the network includes a two-way multi-channel delivery network.
22. The method of claim 9, wherein the network includes a cable TV network.
23. A method for providing targeted advertisements over a communications network including a plurality of transmission channels, the communications network delivering at least a program stream containing programming content through a selected transmission channel, the method comprising:
 - detecting an indicator indicative of an advertising segment within the programming content;

if the indicator is detected, performing the following (a) through (d):

(a) determining an audience currently receiving the programming content;

(b) identifying one or more groups of members of the audience;

(c) allocating one or more available transmission channels for conveying at least one advertisement data stream, the number of available transmission channels allocated being a function of the number of the groups; and

(d) providing, over the allocated one or more transmission channels, the at least one advertisement data stream which contains one or more advertisements targeted at a selected group of members of the audience.

24. The method of claim 23, wherein the indicator contains a message which includes a start time of the advertising segment.

25. The method of claim 23, wherein the indicator includes a DPI cue.

26. The method of claim 23, wherein the network includes a two-way multi-channel delivery network.

27. The method of claim 23, wherein the network includes a cable TV network.

28. A system for delivering programming content over a communications network, comprising:

a detector for detecting an indicator indicative of an event in the delivery of the programming content;

a processing unit, responsive to a detection of the indicator, for determining an audience currently receiving the programming content, data being obtained which is descriptive of at least one group of members of the audience;

a server for generating at least one programming segment based at least on the data; and

a mechanism for providing, to the at least one group, the at least one programming segment in lieu of the programming content during the event.

29. The system of claim 28, wherein the indicator contains a message which includes a start time of the event.

30. The system of claim 28, wherein available transmission channels in the network are identified, the at least one programming segment being transmitted over at least one of the available transmission channels.

31. The system of claim 28, wherein the event includes an advertisement break.

32. The system of claim 28, wherein the indicator includes a DPI cue.

33. The system of claim 28, wherein the at least one programming segment comprises one or more advertisements.

34. The system of claim 28, wherein the network includes a two-way multi-channel delivery network.

35. The system of claim 28, wherein the network includes a cable TV network.

36. A system for delivering a program stream containing programming material over a communications network to a plurality of user terminals, comprising:

a detector for detecting, in the program stream, a message indicating a scheduled programming segment;

a processing unit responsive to a detection of the message, for identifying a set of one or more user terminals which is currently receiving the program stream, one or more groups of user terminals within the set being identified;

a server for generating one or more data streams containing one or more alternate programming segments for substituting the scheduled programming segment; and

a mechanism for providing at least one of the data streams to a selected one of the identified groups over the communications network.

37. The system of claim 36, wherein the scheduled programming segment comprises one or more advertisements.

38. The system of claim 36, wherein the message includes a start time of the scheduled programming segment.

39. The system of claim 36, wherein the message includes a DPI cue.

40. The system of claim 36, wherein at least one of the alternate programming segments comprises advertisements.

41. The system of claim 36, wherein at least one user terminal in the selected group is directed to tune from a first transmission channel to a second transmission channel at the start of the scheduled programming segment, and to re-tune to the first transmission channel at the end of the scheduled programming segment, the at least one data stream being transmitted over the second transmission channel.

42. The system of claim 36, wherein the one or more groups are identified by analyzing demographic data associated with the user terminals in the set.

43. The system of claim 36, wherein the one or more groups are identified as a function of at least the number of available transmission channels in the network.

44. The system of claim 43, wherein the one or more groups are identified also as a function of the number of additional scheduled programming segments expected to occur concurrently with the scheduled programming segment.

45. The system of claim 43, wherein the one or more groups are identified also as a function of the number of additional program streams expected to be delivered concurrently with the program stream during the scheduled programming segment.

46. The system of claim 45, wherein the additional program streams utilize a subset of the available transmission channels.

47. The system of claim 43, wherein a subset of the available transmission channels for carrying the one or more data streams is determined.

48. The system of claim 36, wherein the network includes a two-way multi-channel delivery network.

49. The system of claim 36, wherein the network includes a cable TV network.

50. A system for providing targeted advertisements over a communications network including a plurality of transmission channels, the communications network delivering at least a program stream containing programming content through a selected transmission channel, the system comprising:

a detector for detecting an indicator indicative of an advertising segment within the programming content;

a processing unit responsive to a detection of the indicator, for determining an audience currently receiving the programming content, one or more groups of members of the audience being identified;

a server for allocating one or more available transmission channels for conveying at least one advertisement data stream, the number of available transmission channels allocated being a function of the number of the groups; and

a mechanism for providing, over the allocated one or more transmission channels, the at least one advertisement data stream which contains one or more advertisements targeted at a selected group of members of the audience.

51. The system of claim 50, wherein the indicator contains a message which includes a start time of the advertising segment.

52. The system of claim 50, wherein the indicator includes a DPI cue.

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53. The system of claim 50, wherein the network includes a two-way multi-channel delivery network.

54. The system of claim 50, wherein the network includes a cable TV network.